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ABSTRACT

By offering police officers office spaces in school buildings at night, theft, break-ins, and vandalism can be deterred. Officers who must write up reports during patrol hours can utilize school facilities while remaining in radio contact with their dispatchers at police headquarters and on alert for further requests for asistance. The officers' presence in the school, and their unpredictable comings and goings, help to deter nighttime vandalism of school property. Trailer watch programs are another inexpensive way to deter vandalism of school buildings at night and at other times when facilities are not in use. In exchange for free site rent and utilities, responsible individuals or families live in a trailer on school grounds. These individuals alert police if anything suspicious is observed around the school property and act as a general deterrent to break-ins and vandalism. (Author/MLF)

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Technical Assistance Bulletin 16

Nighttime School Police Presence

Summary

By offering police officers office spaces in school buildings at night, theft, break-ins, and vandalism can be deterred. Officers who must write up reports during patrol hours can utilize school facilities while remaining in radio contact with their dispatchers at police headquarters and on alert for further requests for assistance. The officers' presence in the school, and their unpredictable comings and goings, help to deter nighttime vandalism of school property.

The Problem

Empty school buildings have been easy targets for break-ins, thefts, and vandalism at night because no one is in the school to report attacks on school property. The continous presence of guards in the school is prohibitively expensive. Similarly, electronic burglar alarms are very costly to install, and when used, they often detect more than they deter.

The Solution

One solution to empty schools at night was instituted in Broward County, Florida where the public school system initiated a pilot program in their city police department. Noting that police officers must keep records and prepare detailed reports of incidents that happen while they are on duty, and that often an officer has to return to police headquarters to prepare a report before going out to patrol again, an office in a middle school was made available to the police officers on duty to use as a convenient place to prepare their reports. A typewriter and telephone were already available in the school office. Using their walkie-talkie radio, the police officers could keep in constant touch with their dispatchers while they were in the school office writing up reports.

Because of the pilot program, police officers could come into the school at night, prepare their reports, and make any necessary telephone calls before returning to patrol duty. The constant, unscheduled comings and goings, and the presence of police officers in the school building, has had a strong deterrent effect on vandalism. Further, the presence of a police car parked outside the school has acted as a visual deterrent, to vandalism, break-ins, and thefts on school property.

(For another solution to the problem of deterring vandalism of empty school buildings, see the NSRN T/A Bulletin on "Trailer Watch Program.")

Replication Issues

In a rural area, where large distances must be covered by officers on patrol, a community might consider renting an office in the school to the police department for use both by day and night as a police substation. A school with declining enrollment might consider converting an unneeded classroom to an office for this purpose.

The chairman of the National Association of School Safety Directors, in describing the pilot program in Broward County, Florida, pointed out that while Broward County has one public school system for the entire county, there are 30 different law enforcement agencies in the county. Jurisdictional differences among law enforcement agencies may make setting up an extensive program complicated, therefore proper time and care should be devoted to planning.

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Required Resources

No extra resources are required for implementing such a program, except for the time spent by school and police officials in setting the program up. A nominal fee for providing keys to the school building to the officers on patrol duty would probably be necessary.

Contact

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For further information on this program, or to request direct technical assistance in implementing a similar program, contact the National Center or the Regional Center nearest you. NSRN technical assistance is available at no cost to requestors.

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Technical Assistance Bulletin

Trailer Watch Programs

Summary

Trailer watch programs provide an inexpensive way to deter vandalism of school buildings at night and at other times when facilities are not in use. In exchange for free site rent and utilities, responsible individuals or families live in a trailer on school grounds. These individuals alert police if anything suspicious is observed around the school property and act generally as a deterrent to break-ins and vandalism. (For another approach to deterring vandalism of empty school buildings see the NSRN T/A Bulletin on "Nighttime School Police Presence.")

The Problem

School buildings which are empty at night and other times when school is not in session are attractive targets for thefts, break-ins, and vandalism. Hiring guards for each school building to deter such incidents is expensive. Electronic alarm systems for detecting acts of vandalism are designed more to catch people than to deter them and are also very expensive.

The Solution

By instituting trailer watch programs, several school districts have been successful in deterring vandalism to school buildings unoccupied at night and other times. To implement such a program, school districts accept applications from individuals who own house trailers and wish to locate their trailer on school property. The school system provides the trailer site and free utilities. Those who are accepted into the program generally have no special duties except to alert the police department if they notice any suspicious activity on the school grounds at night or other times the facilities are not in use. At no time are they expected to intervene, rather their presence serves as a deterrent to acts of vandalism and theft. Three specific programs are described below.

Elk Grove, California

Elk Grove, California, instituted its trailer watch program in 1969. All of the 21 schools within the school district have trailers on school property, and the two high schools in the district each have two trailers. Any Elk Grove citizen may apply to participate; there is no requirement that trailer residents be school employees or law enforcement employees. Trailer residents receive no special training, do not wear uniforms, and do not in any way attempt to confront vandals. Their presence on the school grounds is to act simply as a deterrent.

Broward County, Florida

A trailer watch program was instituted in Broward County, Florida, 8 years ago. Currently 44 public schools, both rural and urban, have trailers on the school grounds. Broward County requires participants in the trailer watch program to be either police officers or school system employees.

Officers in the Florida highway patrol, various sheriff's officers, and other law enforcement agencies take part in this program. However, though many of the people involved in the trailer watch program in Broward County are law enforcement offi-

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cers, they are asked not to intervene if they observe anything suspicious while they are at home off duty. Rather, as in other programs, they are asked to immediately report their concern to the police officer on duty in that jurisdiction. The presence of a police cruiser parked on the school grounds provides an additional visual deterrent to vandalism.

Lake County, Florida

The Lake County School District in Florida has been using a trailer watch program since 1972. Trailers were placed at five schools which had been hit by heavy vandalism. Trailer residents are not required to be police officers or employees of the school system. According to the director of facilities for the school board of Lake County, the amount of vandalism that has occurred at these schools since trailers were placed on school grounds is very minor.

Results

Those school systems that have used trailer watch programs have found them to be very successful. For example, Elk Grove, California, reports that before it instituted the trailer watch program in 1969, vandalism cost the school system $22,000. In the first year after instituting the program, vandalism costs dropped to $2,000. Since then costs have risen, partly due to inflation; and costs due to vandalism last year were $14,000. However, the cost is still significantly less than the $22,000 vandalism cost for 1969.

Replication Issues

Any school system can implement a trailer watch program. Participants should sign a contract or letter of agreement with officers of the school system, in which the rights and duties of each is clearly set out and enumerated. For example, provisions for ending the agreement should be included (such as 30-days written notice if the resident of the trailer is asked to remove the trailer from the school grounds), as well as procedures to be followed if the trailer residents go on prolonged vacations.

Required Resources

School systems establishing trailer watch programs will need to select sites for the trailers and budget costs for their utilities. Other resources needed will be administrative time for selecting, coordinating, and processing participants in the program.

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